Throughout May and June, YEAR students completed their academic year in the U.S. and departed their host communities to return home to Russia. The departure season invoked a wealth of emotions and reflections from the students, who both looked forward to reuniting with loved ones in Russia while also struggling to say goodbye to their new homes, friends, and communities. Students reflected on how their year in the U.S. has fostered new perspectives, new friendships, new skills, and a renewed confidence in themselves.
LOOKING BACK ON A YEAR, CONT.

“This YEAR gave me the chance to discover myself in a place really far away from home. It gave me the opportunity to learn a myriad of new things, to make new wonderful friends, to visit interesting and stunning places, and, above all else, to realize that home is where the heart is. Thank you, YEAR, for what you helped me achieve, discover, and open up my mind to. It was a life-changing experience, and I am going to miss it. I already miss it very, very much because I had the time of my life in the United States. And I mean it!”

Emil, YEAR Student from Nizhny Novgorod
West Virginia University

“I couldn’t imagine how tough and sad but at the same time exciting will be the time before my departure from the US. On the last week I realized that if you asked me what I feel about coming back home a month ago, I would say I’m really excited because I miss my family and friends and I’m absolutely ready to go home. But when things started to get real, I understood how much all these people around me, who I met during my year in the US, mean to me, how nice and attentive they were to me and how hard would it be to say goodbye.”

Mariia, YEAR Student from Tyumen
University of South Dakota

“Honestly, so much has happened during my YEAR journey, so it is hard to pick out some specific things that I will carry home with me… Friendships, volunteering, traveling, college experience etc. For example, now I surely know that friendship across cultures does exist. I have got so many wonderful people around me here and made lots of memories with them. Traveling memories are the ones that will stay in my memory forever too. Seeing places that I dreamed of seeing is unforgettable. Lastly, one of the many things that I gained here is the love of some American dishes. I bought a little book of traditional American recipes and would try to make them at home. My family and friends are already excited to try those dishes out. I’ll always be grateful for this YEAR opportunity in my life. It has changed me completely and I’ll never be looking at some things the same old way.”

Galina, YEAR Student from Omsk
Fox Valley Technical College

“This year gave me a lot. I learned all the traditions and warm feelings of Thanksgiving and Christmas. I became the Super Bowl fan. I’ve got a passion for American-Mexican cuisine. Thanks to [the College of Southern Idaho] and Twin Falls community I looked at the importance of sustainability from another point of view. I will do my best to carry all the knowledge I’ve got with me throughout my life. Thank you, YEAR Program, for this truly unique opportunity!”

Egor, YEAR Student from Abakan
College of Southern Idaho

“This year in the United States gave me more than knowledge; it gave me views, thoughts, new feelings, and a type of thinking. I’ve learned how to live on my own and how to keep my own head above water in extraordinarily odd and exhilarating situations. This year helped me to learn about myself, as well as American culture. Before I came to America, I envisioned certain stereotypes about American life, but in the end, they turned out to be… just stereotypes (ba-dum crash). In the end I realized one of the most important things about traveling abroad, people are the same all over the world.”

Danis, YEAR Student from Kazan
Otero Junior College

“The things I want to share with people in Russia are countless. Firstly, I would love to show them the spirit which I already did in my posts in social media. From the very beginning, I was writing them for myself, to remember all precious moments. But at some point, I started inspiring my friends and peers and I see how they started changing too, some applied for master’s programs in different countries, some are going to the United States with other programs, some became more open-minded and ready for adventures or simply more self-confident which I value the most. I felt so uplifted when I could help them with advice or my support; many of them told me that it was partly because of my story. These are the things I want to live for. Secondly, I will continue sharing information about YEAR. It is such a blessing to have a program like this, so I want to inspire others to apply for it. I will speak about it in my community, my school and my university. People for sure need to know because sometimes we have so many opportunities in life that we don’t know about and it’s a bit sad!”

Kristina, YEAR Student from Dubna
Valencia College

“I realize that I’ve lived these 10 months as consciously as I’d never before. From the very beginning of the program, I knew that my time here was limited, that is why I appreciated every single day. Life goes on and there is a lot waiting for me after this marvelous year in the States. But the experience I gained will for sure stay with me in my future adventures.”

Svetlana, YEAR Student from Perm
Neosho County Community College

“After almost a year I’m trying to sum up all the important things I learned here. I see everything different. Have you ever grown up so fast that you were able to notice it? That’s what happened. Without the YEAR Program I would never have such an experience that changed me the way it did.”

Rodion, YEAR Student from Moscow
University of Idaho
YEAR STUDENTS ON POINT

This YEAR cohort excelled academically, taking on a variety of courses both within and beyond their major fields of study while remaining active on their campuses. 11 students succeeded in maintaining a 4.0 GPA throughout their year in the U.S., resulting in recognition by their host institutions with placement on dean’s lists.

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CULMINATION OF A YEAR

After completing their academic year in the United States, YEAR students across the country celebrated their success with their peers at end-of-year receptions, international student dinners, and graduation ceremonies, where they were recognized with YEAR Program completion certificates and certificates from their host institutions. Congratulations on your achievements, 2018-2019 YEAR Students!
CULMINATION OF A YEAR, CONT.

Nino celebrates graduation at Alma

College of Southern Idaho students at graduation

Whatcom students toss their hats

Grisha and Kristina with their coordinator at Valencia

Fox Valley students and friends at graduation

Northwest students receive certificates
CAREER CONVERSATIONS

During the second semester, YEAR students each completed three informational interviews with professionals working in their major fields of study. This program component encouraged participants to connect to individuals working in jobs of potential interest to them and helped them to gain valuable career advice as they think ahead to their own future professions.

“Thank you, YEAR Program, for providing me with this opportunity to gain new insights in my area of study. Originally, as I was interested in renewable sources of energy, I wanted to conduct interviews only with professionals in this field. But this sphere was only one part of the whole idea of sustainability. That is why I decided to get more knowledge and experience from real professionals working with this kind of problem every day. I have met three outstanding professionals who shared their experience with me and told me what skills I should obtain in order to succeed. I’m extremely grateful for all the experience that these professionals shared with me. It was very interesting to talk to all these people, so our conversation lasted almost two hours. We exchanged our contact information and I hope that we will stay in touch in the nearest future.”

Kirill, YEAR Student from Moscow
West Liberty University

“I wouldn’t say this year has changed my career plans - it clarified them. I knew I was going to become an economist. But I had no idea what it meant to me or what path I was pursuing. I think I was following the flow. This year helped me to understand I always wanted to become a part of some individual enterprise. I love good companies. I believe you have better chances to become friends in a small team. I hope this dream [will] come true.”

Egor, YEAR Student from Abakan
College of Southern Idaho

“Through all my high school years I have been interested in filmmaking. Unfortunately, there was not a single place, where students would be able to get any knowledge in that sphere, so I was figuring out things by myself. YEAR has given me a chance to explore the area I am so passionate about from a professional point of view.”

Milena, YEAR Student from Voronezh
Northcentral Technical College

“Being a YEAR finalist, as I feel, helped me a lot with defining my place in life. I always wanted to be a Graphic Design student but due to many circumstances I never even applied for it back in Russia. I never had enough confidence in myself and this year showed me that no matter how you feel about your skills, you can achieve anything. As one of my professors once said, never be hesitant about your work. Never say you don’t like it. Sell it the way that everyone will adore it even when you’re not sure this will work out.”

Kristina, YEAR Student from Dubna
Valencia College

“All in all, the YEAR Program had huge impact on me in terms of my future job. It made me realize that I was on the right track, but also made [me] think about some possibilities that had never occurred to me. Now I feel more excited than ever before what is waiting for me ahead.”

Aleksandr, YEAR Student from Voronezh
West Virginia University

“My desire to expand the amount of my knowledge brought me to the USA... This year was extremely important for me. I saw design from a different perspective and that absolutely broke all the limits of my imagination. I met wonderful people of my profession like my Theory of Architecture professor Randal Teal [who] explained [to] me the human understanding of architectural forms and turned my professional view towards philosophy.”

Rodion, YEAR Student from Moscow
University of Idaho

“I’m really thankful that YEAR Program is inspiring us to communicate with professionals. I had a chance to talk to people who truly like their job and see an important goal in what they’re doing. I think I was very lucky to find those people.”

Mariia, YEAR Student from Tyumen
University of South Dakota
MULTILINGUAL EXPRESSION

A strong believer in the power of poetry as a form of expression, YEAR student Mariia took it upon herself to organize a multilingual poetry evening at her host institution, Whatcom Community College. “I find it fascinating how differently all languages sound, how each language has a unique touch to it, a unique sense. So, the goal of the event was to showcase that and get people to understand and appreciate this, often overlooked, part of culture.”

Mariia worked together with both American and international students, as well as professors, to organize the event. She comments that it was her first time organizing an event like this, but it gave her a great perspective on American student life to lead a new activity at the school. Explaining her idea behind creating such an event, Mariia says, “…performing with poetry in front of people, who do not know the language, encourages one to be very creative and free in actually expressing the idea or the emotion - that’s why I think this experience was in one way or the other significant for all the listeners and performers.”

On January 24th, various students and faculty gathered to participate in the multilingual poetry night. Mariia designed the night as an open mic event rather than having a set program of pre-registered speakers. She knew that many people would feel nervous about approaching the stage and reciting in public, but, just as she’d anticipated, as those in attendance felt the supportive environment given to the speakers, more and more people decided on a whim to share a poem in their language. The event began with classic poetry from some of the more famous poets, but by the end of the night, Mariia says that people were stepping up to the microphone and reciting poetry they’d made up on the spot. “I tried to encourage performances with a variety of languages including American sign language or the ones that were artificially created for fantasy books,” says Mariia. By the end of the night, there were eight languages utilized in the poems presented: English, Russian, Malaysian, Thai, Spanish, French, and Arabic. “It was pretty inspiring,” Mariia reflects, “and even though the event was not that big, we had a lot of variety in languages, topics, ideas and backgrounds.”

She looks forward to using her new leadership skills to organize future events in her own school or community.

AND HERE’S YOUR HOST...

“If one day in the future you see me on television as a TV personality, that will be the result of the YEAR Program,” says YEAR student Iuliia from Cheboksary.

During her year at West Liberty University, Iuliia has taken great strides to develop herself as a young professional in the field of journalism. After participating with the West Liberty TV crew in the fall, Iuliia then went on to write articles for her university’s newspaper; hold weekly talk shows on West Liberty’s student-run radio station, WGLZ; develop her own show, Yul.Po, which she hosts and shares on YouTube; and create her own TV host reel to demonstrate to television production companies.

Though previously a law major in Russia, Iuliia now looks forward to continuing to advance herself in this new industry as well!
THE ART OF STAGECRAFT

Throughout her life, YEAR student Dina from Kazan enjoyed attending various performances, captivated by the complexity of each show. She often wondered what went into preparing for such a performance and dreamed of someday being part of making that magic happen.

Fast forward to her spring semester at Snow College in Ephraim, UT, where Dina decided to enroll in a stagecraft class. “At first, I was worried as I did not have any experience working in theatre, but our teacher Trent Bean was very professional and understanding and taught the students everything—from special theater terminology and color theory to using the tools,” says Dina. In class, the students learned to build and paint sets, make food props, shoot videos, and write play critiques. One day, professor Bean announced to the class that Snow College would be putting on the show Phantom of the Opera and that there were various open positions on the tech crew. Dina instantly decided to sign up, eager to finally contribute to a show with the new skills she’d learned over the semester.

Dina explains that the tech crew had many responsibilities in the performance—everything from moving props to lifting curtains, and from operating lights to working the fog machines. “Everyone has more than one job to do during the show, so we were busy all the time,” Dina says. “I moved props, worked at the turntable and was moving one of the decorations from the inside. Also, I had a headset which made me look really cool.”

In preparation for the show, Dina and the cast and crew rehearsed for five hours a day, five days a week, for two full weeks. On February 28th, the day of the first of seven performances of Phantom of the Opera arrived. “Originally it was planned to have only six shows, but the tickets sold out so fast that we had to add one more show!” explains Dina.

Dina states that Phantom of the Opera was the largest scale performance ever put on by Snow College, so she was so grateful to be a part of it. “Participating in such an event made me feel like a part of my college and community and its history,” she says. “It taught me not to be scared to try new things and to stay open to new opportunities. I may try to join a theatre when I go back to my university.” Dina states that her favorite part of the whole experience was meeting so many new people, many of whom became her friends as they worked together on the performance. She is grateful for their encouragement and for everything they taught her about theater.

“Theatre at Snow is a really nice place with lots of awesome people, and I am glad to have had the chance to become part of it!”

FAMILY EXPLORATIONS

For YEAR student Egor from Abakan, visiting Yellowstone National Park was a longtime dream, even before learning that he had received a scholarship to spend one year studying at the College of Southern Idaho in the United States. When he arrived in his host community of Twin Falls, ID and met his host family last August, they immediately decided that traveling to Yellowstone National Park would be a priority activity for them as a family.
FAMILY EXPLORATIONS, CONT.

Egor’s first few busy months in the U.S. passed very quickly for him and his host family, so their Yellowstone plans were postponed again and again throughout the fall. At last, right before the season of road closures were set to begin in the park, Egor and his host family piled into the car and took off for a weekend of adventures in Yellowstone National Park. While the excursion ended up falling much later in the year than they’d originally planned, Egor states that this ended up being a major advantage of the trip. “Not many people travel to Yellowstone National Park right before its winter season,” he says. “The park was almost empty, which made me feel like it was just us and nature. I fell under nature’s spell. The landscapes were spectacular and breathtaking yet so dangerous due to geysers. I haven’t been to National Parks like this before. National Parks in the U.S. are reconciliations of human culture and nature. It’s all about recreation, education, and preservation at the same time.”

Egor states that this trip was a highlight of his entire exchange year and helped him become even closer to his host family as they road tripped together, sharing stories and playing games in the car along the way. He notes, “Once our Yellowstone weekend was over, I stopped using prefix ‘host’ when telling about my U.S. family.”

The family’s trip to Yellowstone National Park became the catalyst of a series of travels to national parks out west during Egor’s year in Idaho. By the end of his YEAR, Egor and his host family had visited six national parks – Yellowstone, Arches, Canyonlands, Zion, Bryce Canyon, and Great Basin. Egor recalls a favorite memory from their trip to Arches National Park: “When we were visiting the Arches National Park in Utah, my siblings and I got badges of junior rangers. We spent the whole day reading about the Arches, exploring rocks and soil, and having fun along the way. After our successful presentation, we got the badges that we’re wearing with pride even today.”

Egor’s memories of these trips and his newfound love of nature will stay with him forever, but even stronger is the relationship built with his host family throughout their year discovering new places together.

MAKING A MOVIE

“YEAR gave me opportunity to actually start doing what I was always just thinking about – making films,” says YEAR student from Saint Petersburg, Mikhail. As a political science major at the University of Minnesota – Twin Cities, Mikhail dedicated his first semester to courses in his major and in his secondary interest, business. However, by the time second semester rolled around, he decided he ought to take the chance to sign up for a filmmaking class as well - “...and it was one of the best decisions I made throughout the year,” he says.
Mikhail is always eager to take on a challenge. Thus, instead of enrolling in the logical choice of an introductory filmmaking course, he enrolled in a 3000-level course for more advanced filmmaking students to ensure that he completed the semester with as much advanced knowledge as possible in this new field - even though he had no prior experience in filmmaking. “I always thought that the best strategy to learn something as fast as possible is to throw yourself into water, drown, but learn how to swim, because others around you do,” Mikhail says. It was a tough semester but swim he did. “Filmmaking is a lot harder than just [physically] training yourself for something,” he explains, “because you can exercise as much as you want, and it only takes you and your willpower. Filmmaking takes you, it takes willpower, it takes creativity and then it takes a lot of other people - actors, crew, the people who own the things you need for the film, the people with the places you need to film in, the people who lend you their equipment, (because you need a lot of it…), and then you need to transport it somehow, and transport yourself and the crew to the film locations, and feed the crew, and keep them interested and warm, and plan every minute of the set time beforehand, because you can’t waste people’s time and, of course, you need to have a perfectly ready script, a shot list, and storyboard, and you can’t be failing other classes. So, you have to organize all of that and ensure that people want to help you, though you have no previous experience, so they have actually no reason to trust you and believe in your idea.”

After three months of hard work on his film, which included four full days of filming and many sleepless nights, Mikhail’s hard work came to fruition when he got to showcase his film at the student film screening at the University of Minnesota. He felt proud to see his film on the screen, to receive positive feedback from others, and to see in attendance all those that had supported him in his creation - his friends, the actors, and the crew.

Mikhail is grateful for this unique experience and thrilled to have been able to try out a long-time dream of his, and to have come out swimming on the other side. However, like any challenge, he recognizes that it was thanks to the people who helped and supported him on this journey that ensured him such a successful outcome:

“[This] wouldn’t be possible without all those people who helped me: my friends from America and my friends from Russia; YEAR Program fellows; my host family, who allowed me to film in their house; my host institution, the University of Minnesota; different people who I met traveling in the U.S; and the people who believed in my idea regardless of my lack of experience. That was the journey and I’ll keep going.”

A DISTINGUISHED DELEGATION

YEAR Student Gabriel, native of Kaliningrad, first learned about Model United Nations from a 2016-2017 YEAR alumna who had participated in Model UN at Northwest College during her year on the program. Gabriel was fascinated by this opportunity. The minute she learned that she had also been placed at Northwest College, Gabriel committed herself to one goal: to participate in Northwest College’s Model UN program.
During her first semester at Northwest College, Gabriel worked hard to demonstrate her knowledge and diligence, eager to earn her spot on the Model UN team. It paid off – Gabriel was selected as one of just seven members of the small team. Together, their preparation for the annual Model UN conference in New York City began, where their team would represent the Bahamas. For two months, they researched their various assigned topics, which for Gabriel included cyber security and disarmament. “I liked the process of researching international politics in the Bahamas. Now we want to go to this country to see it in real life.”

At last, on March 23rd, Gabriel and her team traveled to New York for the National Model UN conference. As soon as they arrived, Gabriel could feel the “Model UN atmosphere” exuding from the hotel where the conference was held. They immediately fell into conversations with the other students from around the country and world. “[There were] about 5000 students from 400 schools of 100 countries attending this conference,” says Gabriel. “It was an amazing experience to talk and work with them. These students were smart and they taught me a lot. They told me some tricks and special rules to succeed during the conference.” Throughout the week-long conference, Gabriel worked closely with students from the United States, Mexico, Sweden, Canada, and Lebanon. “Networking and new friends are the best parts about National Model United Nations. You need to force yourself to talk to people and make the first step.”

The conference flew by like a whirlwind for Gabriel. Before she knew it, the week had come to an end, and their delegation from Northwest College was awarded the “Distinguished Delegation” award! It was the first time that Northwest College received the award at a Model UN conference, and Gabriel was proud to have been able to contribute to the team’s success. She looks forward to seeking future opportunities to participate in Model UN, somewhere in the world, as it both inspired her and helped prepare her for her future career in the field of international relations.

“I think in the future I will take part in other Model United Nations because it gave me a real view for my future job.”
"I like the English word ‘education’,” shares YEAR alumni Ekaterina, native of Nizhny Novgorod. “In fact, what I like most about this word is its origin: the word ‘education’ is made of two Latin roots: ‘educare,’ which means to train or to mold, and ‘educere,’ meaning to lead out. These two meanings explain the importance of education, and, moreover, the role of educators/teachers.”

It is no wonder that Ekaterina reflects so deeply on the word ‘education;’ foreign languages are her second love. Since completing her YEAR at West Virginia University in 2018 where she majored in English and served as a volunteer preschool teacher in her free time, Ekaterina has continued to dedicate herself to her passion for education and foreign languages. Shortly after her return to Moscow, Ekaterina was hired by the educational center London Gates Education Group as a teacher of English, German, and the Humanities. “Being a teacher and being loved by kids takes a lot,” reflects Ekaterina. “It requires you to be creative, quick, open-minded, caring, and friendly. Before starting this job, I never thought I would have to explain 12-year-olds the lifestyle in the Roman Empire in my Humanities lessons or make them rap one of the songs from the students’ book in the English lesson in order to make the learning process more fun. After all, the kids’ emotions are everything that matters. Their interest and acknowledgement are more important than acknowledgement of any university professor; their progress is the direct indicator of my progress as a teacher and all of this is truly magnificent.”

This spring, YEAR alumnae Lidiia (native of St. Petersburg) and Bella (native of Bratsk) took the initiative to organize a Media Literacy Day for high school students in Moscow to learn about digital literacy, fake news, media ecology, and decision-making in the digital age. “It seems important to teach the young generation not only mathematics or languages at schools but also media literacy because it is one of the most useful knowledge in the era of a digital society,” explain Lidiia and Bella.
On March 16th, alumni Lidiia and Bella held their media literacy day for 50 high school student attendees at the American Center in Moscow. The first part of the event comprised six workshops which focused on different topics: “How to read the news”, “How to deal with an overload of information”, “How companies sell their products using emoji,” among others. Each participant could select two workshops to attend based on their interests. The next activity included a game in which the participants completed various tasks to test their media literacy skills. For each task they successfully completed, they earned a sticker, which was collected in their personal “passports” for the day. By the end of the day, each participant’s “passport” demonstrated the media literacy skills they’d learned. Lidiia and Bella also invited various prestigious speakers to the event, which included a professor from the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE) Media Department and graduate of the News Literacy program of Stony-Brooke University in the U.S; an editor from the Policy Department for the newspaper “Novaya Gazeta” and lecturer at the Department of Media and Philosophy at HSE; a correspondent for the Economics Department of the large media group, RBC; and a teacher from the Workshop Academy of Communications and winner of the Cannes Lion.

Both Lidiia and Bella were extremely pleased with the outcome of their event and were happy to play a role in popularizing media literacy skills among high school students. “Our Media Literacy Day went great, without exaggerating,” says Lidiia. “Everything was so smooth I can still barely believe it. At the end kids were coming up to high five or give us a hug and thank us. That was one of the happiest days this year!”

“In the last few decades, the digital revolution changed our media consumption faster than we could imagine. Nowadays we can see the effects and consequences of how the Internet affects our everyday life. Teaching youth to consume information through critical thinking and helping them adapt to the era of information overload were our tasks. Weighted decisions begin with media literacy and perceived consumption of information.”

For more information on the YEAR Program, visit www.yearprogram.org.